



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Advances in Life Course Research

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/alcr



Fertility and social interaction at the workplace: Does childbearing spread among colleagues?

Sebastian Pink^{d,e,*}, Thomas Leopold^{a,b,c}, Henriette Engelhardt^c

^a University of Amsterdam, Oudezijds Achterburgwal 185, 1012 DK Amsterdam, The Netherlands

^b European University Institute, Via delle Fontanelle 10, I-50014 San Domenico, Italy

^c Chair of Population Studies, University of Bamberg, Feldkirchenstraße 21, D-96052 Bamberg, Germany

^d Graduate School of Economic and Social Sciences, University of Mannheim, L9, 7, D-68161 Mannheim, Germany

^e Mannheim Centre for European Social Research, University of Mannheim, A5, 6, D-68159 Mannheim, Germany

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 15 May 2013

Received in revised form 28 October 2013

Accepted 2 December 2013

Keywords:

Fertility

Social interaction

Workplace

Linked-Employer–Employee data

ABSTRACT

This research investigates whether colleagues' fertility influences women's transitions to parenthood. We draw on Linked-Employer–Employee data (1993–2007) from the German Institute for Employment Research comprising 33,119 female co-workers in 6579 firms. Results from discrete-time hazard models reveal social interaction effects on fertility among women employed in the same firm. In the year after a colleague gave birth, transition rates to first pregnancy double. This effect declines over time and vanishes after two years. Further analyses suggest that the influence of colleagues' fertility is mediated by social learning.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The vast majority of micro-level studies explain fertility by socio-economic characteristics. A relatively new line of research posits that the decision to have a child is also influenced by interaction partners (Balbo, Billari, & Mills, 2013; Rossier & Bernardi, 2009). Pioneering studies in this direction revealed that social interaction within local communities explained regional differences in fertility levels within developing countries (Bongaarts & Watkins, 1996; Kohler, 2001; Montgomery & Casterline, 1996). In recent years, a growing number of studies have directed attention to social interaction effects on fertility within different networks (Bühler & Fratczak, 2007; Philipov, Spéder, & Billari, 2006).

The current understanding of these effects largely relies on qualitative studies. This fruitful line of research has not only revealed which interaction partners are most influential but has also provided considerable insight into the mechanisms behind social interaction effects on fertility (Keim, Klärner, & Bernardi, 2009; Keim, Klärner, & Bernardi, 2012). In contrast, large-scale representative studies attempting to identify and quantify these effects remain scarce.

In view of that, this study aims to provide a quantitative assessment of social interaction effects on fertility. Specifically, we ask whether colleagues' fertility increases the chance that a woman will become pregnant. In other words, does fertility spread among colleagues? By selecting the workplace as a setting for our study, we focus on a social network in which most individuals spend a considerable amount of their time and are very likely to be exposed to birth events among their interaction partners.

If these events are influential, in turn, a considerable number of colleagues will be affected, suggesting social multiplier effects and possible “chain reactions” of births and subsequent pregnancies within a firm. Furthermore,

* Corresponding author at: Mannheim Centre for European Social Research, University of Mannheim, A5, 6, D-68159 Mannheim, Germany. Tel.: +49 6211812816.

E-mail addresses: sebastian.pink@uni-mannheim.de (S. Pink), t.leopold@uva.nl (T. Leopold), henriette.engelhardt-woelfler@uni-bamberg.de (H. Engelhardt).

information that circulates at the workplace appears to be particularly relevant for fertility decisions because colleagues share a common context. In view of the far-reaching consequences of births and maternity leaves for working careers, the experiences of colleagues might constitute valuable information with regard to fertility decisions.

The analysis of social interaction effects on fertility at the workplace requires data that capture the entire network of colleagues. This requirement is met by the Linked-Employer–Employee (LIAB) data of the German Institute for Employment Research (IAB). The LIAB combines survey data on firms with process-generated data on the entire staff of a firm provided by the German Federal Employment Agency. Based on maternity leave reports, we reconstructed a firm's entire history of birth events. These data enabled us to examine whether and to what extent an employed woman's chance of becoming pregnant was influenced by her colleagues' preceding birth events. To investigate these effects empirically, we estimated discrete-time hazard models based on a sample of 33,119 female co-workers observed longitudinally in 6579 firms.

2. Theoretical background

How do interaction partners influence fertility decisions? This question originated in the work of [Coale and Watkins \(1986\)](#) who examined the decline of birth rates in modern societies. Their study was the first to posit that social interaction might cause regional variation in aggregate levels of fertility. Since then, numerous studies have investigated social interaction effects on fertility. Initially, this research focused mainly on the role of social interaction in the diffusion of contraceptive use in developing countries ([Bongaarts & Watkins, 1996](#); [Kohler, 2001](#); [Montgomery & Casterline, 1996](#)). In contrast, more recent research from developed countries has been interested in the realization rather than the prevention of births. These studies asked how – and why – interaction partners influence the decision of whether and when to have a child.

2.1. Empirical evidence for social interaction effects on fertility

Overall, the literature – particularly the qualitative work of [Bernardi \(2003\)](#), [Bernardi, Keim, and von der Lippe \(2007\)](#), [Keim et al. \(2009, 2012\)](#), and [Keim \(2011\)](#) – has provided ample evidence for the importance of social contacts from different interaction domains (family, friends, acquaintances, colleagues, and neighbors) for fertility decisions. Quantitative tests for such effects, however, remain rare. To our knowledge, only four published studies have examined social interaction effects on fertility quantitatively. Based on Norwegian register data, [Lyngstad and Prskawetz \(2010\)](#) investigated whether siblings' fertility decisions influenced each other. This study showed that the probability of becoming pregnant increased significantly in the 12 months following the birth of a niece or a nephew. [Aparicio Diaz, Fent, Prskawetz, and Bernardi \(2011\)](#) used simulation models calibrated by Austrian census data to examine whether fertility

decisions of “relevant others” influenced transitions to parenthood. Based on agent-based models, this study showed that the transition rate to motherhood increased with the share of network members who had children. [Kotte and Ludwig \(2011\)](#) used pairfam data (Panel Analysis of Intimate Relationships and Family Dynamics; [Huinink et al., 2011](#)) to examine if contagion among siblings explained the transmission of fertility intentions and fertile behavior within a family. This study did not find evidence for fertility contagion between siblings. Birth events in the network of friends, however, appeared to increase the chance of becoming a parent. Using the same data, a further study examined the “contagiousness” of fertility in respondents' personal networks ([Richter, Lois, Arránz Becker, & Kopp, 2012](#)). This investigation indicated contagion effects on higher-order births in East Germany.¹

With regard to the focal area of the present study – the network of colleagues at the workplace – no quantitative investigations have been published to date. Preliminary evidence, however, is offered by two unpublished studies. An analysis based on register data from Sweden examined whether colleagues' fertility decisions influenced each other ([Asphjell, Hensvik, & Nilsson, 2013](#)). This research showed that the probability of childbearing increased significantly in the second year after a colleague had given birth. This effect seemed to operate in a parity-specific fashion. For childless women, all childbearing events were influential whereas for women of higher parity only events experienced by same-parity women mattered. A further analysis based on Danish administrative data reported similar results ([Ciliberto, Miller, Nielsen, & Simonsen, 2012](#)). Taken together, these studies provide suggestive empirical evidence in support of social interaction effects on fertility at the workplace.

2.2. The mechanisms behind social interaction effects on fertility

The literature lists four mechanisms governing social interaction effects on fertility: social support, social pressure, social contagion, and social learning. *Social support* is defined as the opportunity to receive financial, instrumental, and/or emotional support from interaction partners. An obvious example is parental childcare assistance. The mechanism of *social pressure* influences decision-making by means of sanctions and/or rewards. Such pressure can be exerted, for instance, by parents who express their wish to have a grandchild. *Social contagion* refers to emotional reactions that individuals are not necessarily aware of. This mechanism operates, for instance, when contact with pregnant women or newborns affects the wish to have a child or the timing of parenthood. Finally, *social learning* refers to the process by which individual perceptions of relevant aspects regarding the fertility decision are changed by new information obtained

¹ In addition to these studies, two currently unpublished investigations of fertility-related social interaction effects among friends ([Balbo & Barban, 2012](#)) and siblings ([Kuziemko, 2006](#)) have also reported positive effects.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6785085>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6785085>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)